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Personal Opinion

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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Statement of Senator Mike Mansfield (D., Montana)
~~December 16, 1960~~

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At the present time we have five divisions in Western Europe. Arrayed against these limited forces are over 25 Russian divisions, deployed largely in East Germany, but also in Poland and Hungary. While it is true that the Western European nations, particularly West Germany, have available additional men under arms in Western Europe, their numbers are probably off-set by the forces in the Eastern European satellites. The numerical imbalance as between the Russian forces and our own committed in Europe is overwhelmingly weighted on the side of the Soviet Union. From this it is clear that the U.S. divisions in Europe, as such, have lost real meaning in terms of the shield concept of NATO.

Protestations to the contrary, their significant meaning is as a symbol of our commitment to join in the defense of Western Europe with all our strength and all our weapons if that area is invaded. A symbol of this kind would be no less a symbol if the U. S. commitment were to consist of two or three divisions rather than five. One would hope, therefore, that it would be possible to offer to reduce our total commitments of forces in Europe by two or three divisions in turn for a Russian willingness to cut their forces in Hungary, Poland and Germany by a roughly proportionate number -- say somewhere in excess of ten.

That would be an important step towards easing tensions in Europe. It also would permit the Russians to reduce their armaments expenditures - which they are apparently anxious to do. It would permit us to save a substantial amount of dollars in gold, which we are now draining out of the country, in no small part because of the numbers of troops with dependents and supporting structure which we maintain in Europe. At the same time the removal of two or three divisions with all of its dependents might make it possible to ease up on the financial pressure and, hence, to permit the dependents of those men who would remain in Europe to stay with them.

Finally, if the Europeans felt their security weakened by a withdrawal of the American forces, they are in a financial position now to strengthen their own military forces, and could do so.

In short, an initiative in this situation seeking to bring about a concurrent reduction of both Russian and U. S. forces in Europe would be a rational step towards normalcy in Europe and peace. It would be a step benefitting all the nations involved and reflecting the improved stability, financially and otherwise of Western Europe. These possibilities should be explored diplomatically on their own merit as a part of - but a distinct part of the over-all major questions of security in all Europe and disarmament.

Copies for your information

Personal Opinion of Senator Mike Mansfield (D., Montana)

For Release Monday a. m., January 2, 1961

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